Compelling Interest

EXAMINING THE EVIDENCE

ON RACIAL DYNAMICS

IN COLLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES

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INTRODUCTION

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Next year will mark the fiftieth anniversary of the pioneering Supreme Court decision *Brown v. the Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas,* which reversed *Plessy v. Ferguson* and made racial segregation illegal. The lawyers arguing the case for Brown used social science evidence to disprove the many commonly held beliefs about race and racism that had been used to justify segregation. Now, nearly fifty years later, as success and prestige become increasingly associated with advanced degrees, and as the U.S. population grows more diverse, the debates surrounding the consideration of race in higher education admissions and hiring decisions are growing more contentious, and the courts of law and public opinion are once again struggling with issues in this area that social science evidence has the potential to address.

Many questions pervade public discussions and underlie current court cases and ballot initiatives: What would a fair admissions and hiring process look like? Are standardized tests such as the SAT the best way to measure academic worth and potential? For whom are they valid and in what conditions? Who benefits from racially diverse campuses and in what ways? Should individual students all be judged by the same criteria regardless of group membership? Has the educational playing field been leveled for students of different races? Is affirmative action inherently discriminatory? To what extent does racism still exist? Does affirmative action compromise the quality of the student body? Will using only test scores and high school grades enable

universities to admit enough students of color or do universities need to use alternate criteria to admit sufficient numbers? What should the role of colleges and universities be in helping to improve race relations in this country and to diversify future cadres of leaders? The research literature has much to say about these pressing questions, yet it has not received sufficient public, governmental, or legal attention. This book examines the potential of existing social science evidence to inform these very complex issues and questions in the hope of engendering more informed policies and public discourse about what has mostly been an ideologically driven topic.

Legal arguments for diversity and affirmative action are predicated on the notion that diversity (racial, ethnic, gender, and class) in higher education serves a compelling interest both to the institutions and to the society into which students will enter. Until recently, there was an assumption in much of higher education that the benefits of diversity are self-evident. Ample anecdotal evidence existed that convinced most educators of the validity of the claim. During the past few years, however, there have been many attacks on affirmative action and diversity programs in selective colleges and universities around the country. The passage of ballot initiatives in California and Washington state to end affirmative action, and court cases such as those against the University of Georgia, the University of Michigan, and the University of Texas law school have threatened the ability of higher education institutions to preserve the diversity of their student bodies. These challenges essentially question the judgments of educators about the best way to provide their students with a quality education. Although the judgments of educators may be disputable, an examination of existing research can help raise the level of discussion.

What does empirical research have to say about the educational effects of diversity? To answer this question, we conducted an extensive review of the social science literature. The research we uncovered, which we present in the following chapters, is closely aligned with the judgments of educators. In short, the evidence consistently demonstrates that a diverse student body adds value to the educational process and to institutions of higher learning when colleges and universities are committed to implementing and sustaining initiatives that promote the unique benefits that diversity provides.

Despite the general public's appearing to espouse the ideals and benefits of diversity (Ford Foundation press release, September 6, 1998), people often believe that affirmative action is not the best means for achieving a racially di-

verse campus and that any policy that takes race into account when apportioning opportunity inevitably harms members of racial groups who are not awarded preferences. For the most part, people acknowledge that slavery, legalized segregation, discrimination, and racism have hurt members of minority groups, particularly African Americans, in the past. A good portion of the public discourse, however, proceeds as if the Civil Rights movement brought an end to the harmful effects of policies and laws that existed for centuries and to discrimination and racism themselves. The popular belief seems to be that if they have not ended, it is time they did, but there is little that higher education can do to stamp them out completely; therefore, it is better for colleges and universities to proceed without accounting for racial differences (D'Souza 1991; Thernstrom and Thernstrom 1997).

Because of such interpretations, when it comes to determining how to allocate prized positions in highly selective institutions of higher education, "fairness" and "justice" are accepted at face value and not in relation to broader social circumstances. In other words, instead of understanding affirmative action as a policy that affords opportunity to students who have demonstrated merit despite the many obstacles that have arisen largely as the result of the historical vestiges of racism, it is understood as denying opportunity to more "qualified" individuals who happen to be white. The ways in which being white has afforded privileges to many individuals and generations of their family are not acknowledged. Indeed, this view of fairness ignores the very segregated nature of our society in which the majority of racial groups continue to lead almost completely separate existences and the different opportunities that those separate existences afford or deny (Hacker 1992; Massey and Denton 1993; Schuman et al. 1997).

This book takes the arguments concerning affirmative action in higher education and places them within the frame of reference that the last twenty years of social science research provides. It synthesizes the rapidly expanding, cumulative body of evidence on these issues in order to bring both contemporary and historical context into the discussions taking place in the courts and in public discourse. Although this book brings evidence to bear on what the benefits of diversity are, such evidence cannot be disentangled from the larger issues of the role of higher education, fairness and merit, and the ways in which race continues to matter in the United States. A broader consideration of the arguments can help clarify the compelling interest that diversity

serves to individuals, institutions, and society. Before addressing some of those larger issues, we first present an overview of the status of affirmative action in higher education.

Case Law and the Benefits of Diversity

The legal notion of diversity as a compelling interest of an institution of higher education was defined by Justice Lewis Powell's decision in the 1978 Supreme Court case *Regents of the University of California v. Bakke.* This case challenged the University of California at Davis (UC Davis) medical school's practice of reserving sixteen spots in each entering class of one hundred for African American, Latino, and Asian American students—students who, as a group, commonly experienced racial discrimination. Allan Bakke, a white applicant, sued UC Davis claiming that the admissions process violated the Equal Protection Clause as well as Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, which bars racial discrimination by federally assisted institutions.

Justice Powell, who supplied the pivotal vote on this decision, held that racial quotas were unconstitutional but that a university should be permitted to take into account an applicant's race as part of the admissions process. Applying the strict scrutiny standard, Powell stated that the plan was permissible if (1) its objective was compelling and (2) the racial classification was necessary to achieve the objective. Powell wrote that diversity could be achieved through a process in which all factors being equal, race could be considered as a "plus" factor. He rejected other proposed objectives, including the need to reduce the shortage of minority medical students and doctors, the need to cure the results of past discrimination by society, and the need to increase the number of doctors who will practice in currently underserved communities.

Powell identified the medical school's interest in providing the educational benefits of a diverse student body as a permissible basis for the consideration of race in student admissions. Explaining this decision, Powell stated that qualified students with a background that is diverse in some way, whether it be ethnic, geographic, or economic, may bring to a professional school experiences, outlooks, and ideas that enhance the training of the student body and better equip the institution's graduates. Powell maintained that in addition to producing leaders trained through wide exposure to a robust exchange of

ideas, a diverse student body encourages speculation, experimenting, and creativity that is central to the mission and quality of higher education.

Although in this case Justice Powell was writing solely for himself and not the majority of a deeply divided Supreme Court, his opinion in *Bakke* is now regularly upheld to defend race-conscious admissions programs. The extent to which Powell's opinion represents the opinion of the Court and educational realities is now being challenged on legal, civic, and empirical grounds.

Current Status of Minority Student Admissions

Although *Bakke* is still the law of the land in most of the country, the 1996 *Hopwood* decision in the U.S. Fifth Circuit Court (affecting Texas, where the suit was filed, as well as Louisiana and Mississippi) and the passage of the ballot initiatives Proposition 209 in California and Initiative 200 in Washington have outlawed the consideration of race in higher education admissions and hiring decisions in these states. Other ballot initiatives in states such as Florida threaten to overturn *Bakke* as well. Without *Bakke* and the permissibility of considering race as a "plus factor," the numbers of non-Asian minority students at selective public institutions in those states have drastically decreased.[1] In 1998, the first year Proposition 209 was in effect in the undergraduate admissions process, there was a 66 percent decline in the number of black students and a 53 percent decline in the number of Latino students admitted to the University of California at Berkeley, one of the flagship campuses of the University of California system.

At Boalt, California's most selective public law school, when Proposition 209 went into effect in the fall of 1997, the entering class included only one African American and fourteen Latino students.[2] To counter this alarmingly small enrollment of African American and Latino students, Boalt administrators implemented a number of changes and efforts in 1998. Among those efforts were reducing the importance of minute differences in grade point averages and law school board scores, abolishing the practice of granting bonus points to Ivy League applicants, encouraging students to write about their experiences with overcoming adversity (including discrimination), and granting extra consideration to qualified applicants who came from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, University of California campuses in general

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have engaged in stronger outreach to recruit qualified minority students from around the state. Overall these efforts resulted in more than doubling the previous year's number of underrepresented minority students choosing to attend Boalt (Boalt Hall news release, August 17, 1998).[3] Nevertheless, the number of underrepresented minority students attending both Boalt and the University of California, Berkeley, as a whole is still less than 50 percent of what it was before the elimination of affirmative action.

The University of California has also implemented some of the above changes at the undergraduate level. In addition, Governor Gray Davis in 1999 approved a Four Percent Plan in which the top 4 percent of each high school class would be admitted to the University of California system regardless of SAT score. Deemphasizing standardized test scores may well increase the acceptance rate of underrepresented students into the University of California system because this strategy addresses the persistent test score disparities between different racial groups. However, it is unclear whether this plan will significantly increase the enrollment of underrepresented students at both Berkeley and the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), the state's public flagship institutions. The numbers and proportion of African American and Latino students on these two campuses have shrunk as a result of Proposition 209, whereas the enrollment figures for these two groups of students have increased at less selective universities in the University of California system (i.e., University of California at Riverside; see Traub 1999). Interestingly, Proposition 209 has not resulted in the absence of non-Asian minorities from the University of California system. It has, instead, seemingly produced a significantly more segregated system in which the flagship institutions are predominantly white and Asian and the least selective institutions are disproportionately black and Hispanic. If this trend continues, it will have serious implications for not only de facto racial segregation but also equal educational and postgraduate opportunities (Karabel 1999). An effective plan will need to take into account both the overall enrollment of underrepresented students in the University of California system as well as their enrollment in the two most prestigious institutions.

In Texas, after the *Hopwood* decision, the decline in minority admissions was equally dramatic. In 1996, before the decision, there had been 266 matriculating black undergraduate students in the state's flagship university, the University of Texas at Austin. In 1997, the number had dropped to 190. Alarmed by

this precipitous drop, the Texas legislature passed a Ten Percent Plan in which the top 10 percent of students from every high school in the state would automatically qualify for admission regardless of their SAT scores. This plan did not, however, increase the number of African American students to the level hoped—in 1998, only 199 African American students matriculated. By comparison, Latino student enrollment was not set back as much: in the fall of 1996, 932 Latino students enrolled, compared with 892 in 1997, and 891 in 1998 (University of Texas, Austin Office of Institutional Studies, November 4 1998, personal communication).

More recently, the *Chronicle of Higher Education* (Hebel 2000) reported that debates over affirmative action at the University of Virginia, which triggered the elimination of a scoring system that gave "booster points" to black applicants, may account for the largest single-year drop in black applicants in the institution's history. The number of black students seeking undergraduate admission to the University of Virginia fell by more than 25 percent, dropping from 1,287 in 1999 to 961 in 2000. According to the *Chronicle*, this drop fueled more campus debates over admissions policies and the wisdom of retreating from more aggressive affirmative action practices.

The Significance of Attending a Selective Institution

As a wide range of strategies are developed and implemented to increase the enrollment of underrepresented students in the wake of regional bans on affirmative action, a competing perspective has recently gained wider public attention. This perspective, which is typified by a recent article by James Traub (1999) in the *New York Times Magazine*, argues that the "end" of affirmative action is actually the "beginning of something better." In the absence of affirmative action, according to this argument, more legitimate efforts such as enhanced outreach programs will eventually bring the numbers of minority students back (almost) to their original levels. In the mean time, students who are not accepted to the most selective institutions "cascade down" to the less selective ones. The result, Traub hypothesizes, is that everyone is better off because no students are asked to do work that is over their heads and no students feel undeserving of the spots awarded them by their institutions.

This rethinking of race-conscious policies appeals to popular sentiments

about educational access and meritocracy. Critiquing this argument, which he refers to as the new "conventional wisdom," Jerome Karabel (1999) points out that today's situation with professional schools easily belies the notion that everyone will be accommodated somewhere so affirmative action is not necessary. For example, according to Karabel, 62 percent of those who apply to medical school each year are not accepted by a single one. Therefore, a student cannot necessarily "cascade down" to another school lower down the pecking order. As Karabel states: "if you cascade down, you cascade out," and you are prohibited from joining the future ranks of doctors. The new "conventional wisdom" also fails to acknowledge that attending a selective undergraduate institution dramatically increases minority students' chances of both graduating and being accepted into a graduate or professional school (Bowen and Bok 1998). The latter is especially significant at a time when advanced degrees are becoming increasingly necessary for obtaining high-ranking leadership positions in many fields.

If admission to selective universities were not seen as a gateway to other golden financial and social opportunities, then race-conscious policies that grant access to that gateway would draw little fire. But clearly, attending and graduating from an elite institution afford significant tangible benefits. The groundbreaking study by two former university presidents, William Bowen and Derek Bok (1998), offers strong evidence for sizable economic advantages (in addition to other benefits) that attending a selective institution brings to students of all races. Among their many findings is that on average, relative earnings for white male graduates who in 1976 entered one of the twenty-eight selective schools in their study were 61 percent higher than were the earnings of their counterparts—that is, others who had received a B.A.—nationwide. They also found that the salaries of white female graduates of these schools who had matriculated in 1976 were on average 55 percent higher than those of their national counterparts. Graduating from a selective institution improves earning prospects for blacks even more significantly than it does for whites. The findings of Bowen and Bok's study show that black male college graduates from the twenty-eight selective institutions in their sample were found to earn an average of 82 percent more than their counterparts with B.A.'s nationwide. Similarly, black female graduates of these selective institutions earned 73 percent more than did black female college graduates nationwide.

Significantly, Bowen and Bok's findings contrast sharply with the popular

image of minority students who are "in over their heads" at the selective schools into which they were admitted through affirmative action. Their results show that by every measure of success (e.g., grade point average, graduate school admissions, higher earnings after college, and satisfaction with college experience), the more selective the college or university that African American students attended, the more they achieved, holding constant their initial test scores and grades. Despite this evidence, one of the most common arguments levied against affirmative action is that it is unfair to the students who are admitted when they are not "qualified" to do the work.

Given the many tangible short- and long-term benefits gained from attending a selective college or university, many fear that decreased access to those institutions will not only negatively affect educational opportunities but will also exacerbate occupational, residential, and social segregation. It is important to point out that university affirmative action programs, taken together, seek to ensure universal access to higher education by striving to provide broader access for underrepresented minority groups, particularly to the most selective institutions. The majority of colleges and universities in the United States are not selective and do not need to have policies of affirmative action.[4] Indeed, given the current demands of the United States workforce for international competitiveness and solvency, the basic tensions underlying affirmative action debates do not center on whether or not higher education should be available to all those qualified and willing to participate, but on what "merits" the small number of spots available at highly selective institutions should be granted. Therefore, affirmative action litigation and much of the recent diversity literature focus on the admissions practices of four-year selective institutions of higher education that have disproportionately high numbers of white students. For these reasons, nonselective universities, community colleges, or colleges specifically targeted to underrepresented minority student populations (e.g., historically black colleges and universities) are often ignored in these discussions, even though those institutions provide fundamental insights into how higher education can best use diversity to achieve widespread educational benefits.

An important objective of this book is to broaden the thinking about diversity in order to move beyond the legal controversy over affirmative action policies and the allocation of the small number of spots available at selective institutions. This interest is driven in part by our concerns about the myopic and misleading legal challenges that neglect the dynamics of race in Ameri-

can society. After careful examination of the research literature, it became clear to us that the charges against affirmative action contradict the social science evidence. As such, we are troubled by the litigation surrounding affirmative action not only because it endangers the potential for maximizing the educational benefits of diversity at institutions such as the University of Michigan and UCLA, but also because it perpetuates certain pernicious myths about the reality of racism in this country (that it has ended), about the nature of university curricula (that they are now more inclusive), about the potential for underrepresented minorities to succeed (that they are inherently inferior), and about what constitutes merit (grades and test scores only). Although the legal consequences of affirmative action litigation have a direct impact only on the selective institutions and their applicants, the underlying implications that arise from this litigation are central to related educational practices of all institutions, regardless of their degree of selectivity, and to the pursuit of civil rights in society at large. It is in this broader context, relevant to all institutions of higher education, that we wish to consider debates over affirmative action and the need for racial diversity. To broaden the discourse, in this introduction we briefly raise several pressing issues and concerns that underlie the discussions throughout this book and are addressed more substantively in other chapters.

The Role of Higher Education

Perhaps most disturbing about the current attacks on affirmative action is that they regularly ignore the fact that the mission of virtually every college and university extends beyond the needs and rights of the individual student and institution to include as well an aspiration to improve the communities and lives of people who live beyond the university walls. Arguably, before the introduction of the GI Bill, higher education was considered a privilege bestowed only on the select few who were typically wealthy, male, and white. As societal values came to reflect civil rights interests, and as technology and other innovations have heightened the need for a highly skilled, well-educated, and highly specialized workforce, the need to diversify access to higher education has grown commensurately. At the individual level, a four-year degree grows increasingly critical in determining life opportunities. According to Donald Kennedy, former president of Stanford University, the impact of postsecondary

education on lifetime earnings grew during the 1980s to create the largest disparity in history between those with college education and those without. Higher education also has an increasing responsibility for our country's economic future. As Kennedy states, "Higher education today is challenged to fulfill a new and staggering burden. Always expected to make young people more skilled, more cultured, and more thoughtful, it now is seen as the motive power for regional economic improvement and even for international competitiveness" (Kennedy 1997, 3).

If formerly underrepresented minority students now have widespread access to college education, why do we need to be concerned with bolstering diversity at elite institutions? Again, tensions surrounding the answer to this question emerge from conflicting notions of higher education, and specifically, elite higher education, as a private or a public good. Opponents of affirmative action have framed the debate in terms of the unfairness that the race-conscious admissions policy inflicts on the nonbeneficiaries of the policy, who as individuals are bereft of the prospects for higher earnings and better education they allegedly would have been granted in the policy's absence. We believe that limiting the mission of higher education to only individual interests is too narrow. The purpose of education, according to Thomas Jefferson, is not just to serve the individual participant but to foster a society of educated people who will in turn contribute to the economic and civic life of the entire community. Institutions of higher education, particularly elite institutions, have become an important medium for developing future societal leaders and for the advancement of knowledge essential to engendering economic progress and democratic participation. For these and other reasons, most colleges and universities have implemented an array of what might be loosely termed diversity initiatives (Chang 2000; Hurtado et al. 1998; Smith et al. 1997).

In determining their diversity policies, both universities and the communities into which they send their students must grapple with the following questions: To what extent can students receive a meaningful education that prepares them to participate in an increasingly diverse society if the student body and faculty are not diverse? How can universities address the issues that are central to a diverse society if they do not have adequate representation of that diversity? What role should universities play in compensating students for the inequities present in our current K-12 education system (Orfield 1990, 1992; Valencia 1991; Trent 1991; U.S. Department of Education, Na-

tional Center for Education Statistics 1992)? What do selective institutions and the communities into which they send their students lose if they lack diversity? In other words, what are the implications of excluding people of color from the cohorts of those being prepared for leadership in our society?

Individual answers to these questions depend in part on whether one believes that higher education should anticipate the public's needs before they arise or merely react to them after they are felt. If the former, then the "health, the progress—indeed the survival—of universities," using the words of Constantine Zurayk (1968, 22), are linked to whether institutions can anticipate and develop effective strategies for the needs of a rapidly changing society. To be sure, the role of the university has changed dramatically over the past century, reflecting the changing needs and interests of society. In contrast to the early days of higher education, when universities were seen more as ivory towers divorced from the everyday workings of general society, the past century has witnessed a greater reliance by government and policy makers on these institutions of higher education (Bok 1990). The growing influence of the university is particularly evident in the case of elite institutions, which are usually research institutions that have tremendous influence on society. If colleges and universities are to remain responsive and relevant to the needs of the broader society, diversity-related issues will surely take on even greater significance as our nation's population grows increasingly more diverse. The linkage between diversity and the societal relevance of the university is reflected in the following statement made by the University of Texas chancellor William H. Cunningham in reference to the decision by the University of Texas Regents to appeal the *Hopwood* case: "Texas will soon be a majority/minority state. The long-term social, cultural, and economic vitality of Texas is irrevocably linked to its ability to recruit and graduate minority students. While families and the public school system share the major role in the process of preparing students to enter college, institutions of higher education must recognize their responsibility to recruit and graduate Texans from all ethnic backgrounds" (University of Texas system, press release, May 13, 1998).

In our own experiences as college and university professors and administrators, we have witnessed firsthand the tremendous impact that the presence of diversity in the student body, faculty, and administration has had at the institutions in which we work and in academia in general. Entirely new curricula have evolved, along with the emergence of new ways of analyzing prob-

lems, new historical, literary, and political paradigms, innovative pedagogical approaches and areas of research, and enduring bonds with local communities, all of which have made universities more dynamic, relevant, and intellectually stimulating places to work and learn. Although one's skin color and ethnicity do not reflect a particular mindset, given the significance of race in American society, people of different racial and ethnic backgrounds are likely to bring different experiences, perspectives, interests, and analyses to a college campus.

The presence of diversity in colleges and universities may also have implications for adequately preparing students for citizenship. Dennis W. Brogan (1944) once observed that high schools are places where students "instruct" each other to live in America. As the next century approaches, this statement is even more applicable to American colleges and universities, which have come to be viewed as a rite of passage to adulthood and lives beyond the university walls. Judging from the empirical evidence discussed in this book and from our own observations, students who are exposed to diverse experiences, perspectives, and ways of thinking that truly reflect the multiracial and multiethnic society of the United States will be better prepared to participate meaningfully in it.

College and university campuses are also ideal settings for engaging students in diversity-related issues. Traditional-age college students, for example, are relatively more open to embracing new ideas and to exposing themselves to different experiences. Consequently, college students often undergo tremendous personal growth and changes in their attitudes and perspectives during their undergraduate years (Astin 1993). Moreover, unlike K-12 schools, the relative autonomy of institutions of higher education allows these institutions to be more deliberate about engaging students, research, and educational programs. Given these unique conditions, colleges and universities have a rare opportunity to challenge students' stereotypes and to engender a willingness in students to improve their understanding of and interactions with people of other racial and ethnic groups.

This opportunity should not be overlooked, because natural settings in which diverse individuals share common goals and relatively equal status are rare yet extremely important for improving racial dynamics. Given the persistent patterns of segregated housing and K-12 schooling, many college students will encounter their first substantial experience with diversity during their undergraduate years. As historian Thomas Sugrue (1999) states in his

deposition on behalf of the University of Michigan in the lawsuit brought against it: "There are unfortunately few places in American society where people of different backgrounds interact, learn from each other and struggle to understand their differences and discover their commonality." Residential settings on campuses, for example, present a unique but often untapped opportunity for molding intergroup relations.

Unfortunately, many universities relegate their diversity initiatives to marginalized multicultural affairs offices or offices of affirmative action that are piecemeal, understaffed, and not central to the infrastructure of the university. Although diversity initiatives have begun to evolve on many campuses, diversity is still too often compartmentalized into admissions, curriculum, a few racial awareness workshops, and hiring (the addition of a small number of minority faculty and staff), each of which is considered beneficial mostly to the students who are members of groups traditionally denied access. By contrast, when diversity is viewed as central to the educational enterprise and there is a strong, integrated commitment at all levels of the institution, the research literature shows that all members of the university community benefit from the new ideas, perspectives, ways of approaching problems, teaching methods, and scholarship (Smith et al. 1997). Given these benefits, new curricular approaches that embrace diversity should not be viewed as benefiting only students of color (and implicitly harming white students by "dumbing down" the curriculum); instead, these approaches should be recognized as providing an intellectually enriching and relevant "world-class" education for *all* students.

Merit

Another important issue in the affirmative action debate surrounds the notion of merit. In the public discourse, equity and excellence in higher education are often pitted against each other. Merit is usually narrowly, and exclusively, equated with test scores, and because the scores of blacks, Latinos, and Native Americans are as a group approximately one standard deviation below those of whites and Asians, these minority students are considered to be less deserving. Court cases such as *Hopwood v. Texas* and *Gratz v. Bollinger* have presented the score differentials between non-Asian minority students and the plaintiffs as central components of their testimony.

Equating merit solely with test scores ignores the multifaceted dimensions of academic success. Those who have earned a college degree know quite well that this achievement requires more than just high test scores. Other individual characteristics such as perseverance, creativity, experiences outside the classroom, demonstrated commitment to different causes, resiliency, public-speaking skills, leadership capacity, and ability to overcome challenges, to name a few, contribute to academic success. Moreover, because colleges and universities are responsible for providing their students with the best education possible, the notion of success at the institutional level can also be legitimately broadened to include an applicant's capacity to educate others and to contribute to each campus's intellectual and cultural life. Indeed, most institutions look beyond standardized test scores. What is routinely ignored in court cases that allege unfair preferential treatment toward minorities when differences in test scores are apparent is the fact that many white students with lower test scores than those of the plaintiffs were also admitted because they possess certain qualities that the university seeks (e.g., *Gratz v. Bollinger*). Some of these qualities might also be immutable characteristics, such as geographical diversity or legacy status; others might be a student's experience working on a farm or playing a musical instrument, or a student's athletic ability or commitment to public service.

Like their opponents, supporters of affirmative action also uphold the importance of merit in determining which applicants are to be admitted. The two sides disagree, however, on what constitutes merit. Supporters argue that current definitions of merit are too narrow and still favor those with privileged upbringings and backgrounds. Thus, in the absence of broader and more accurate definitions of merit, supporters of affirmative action argue that it helps to ensure that employers and institutions of higher education look beyond their traditional applicant pools and consider all qualified applicants fairly. Providing equal access and opportunity to those who have been historically excluded from these institutions was, and continues to be, the primary goal of affirmative action. As Maphela Ramphele (1999) points out in her discussion of the need for affirmative action in South Africa, throwing all applicants into the same pool and asking them to sink or swim ignores the fact that some people have "life boats," that the swimming pool is typically constructed for certain body types, and that the standards for judging success or failure to swim are shaped by the cultural lens used to evaluate performance.

Taking Account of Race

Critics charge not only that affirmative action practices contradict notions of merit but also that they violate the American creed widely considered the foundation of our society and culture. They argue, for example, that governmental efforts to artificially impose equal opportunity through race-conscious policies counteract the "race-neutral" spirit of the fourteenth amendment. In response, James Jones (1997) stressed that the Civil Rights movement regularly advocated race-conscious policies in an attempt to remove race as a barrier to opportunity and to minimize its negative impact. By all historical accounts, the movement was *not* an effort to eradicate the consideration of race in public policy. This important distinction is often obscured in the media and public discussion, where the Civil Rights movement has often been misinterpreted as having advocated a color-blind society under the slogan of "equal opportunity for all," in which equality would be achieved by abandoning race. Jones argues that to implement a policy of color blindness after centuries of affirmative action for European Americans would merely "calcify the inequality of previous generations in contemporary culture" (524). Civil rights legislation could not erase the effects of the discrimination that has persisted for centuries in this country. It could also not destroy prejudices that existed, and continue to exist, in people's minds and hearts. The paradox inherent in facilitating equal treatment of individuals by recognizing persistent biases against groups is encapsulated by a famous statement by President Lyndon B. Johnson during a 1965 speech at Howard University in which he justified the need for affirmative action:

> You do not wipe away the scars of centuries by saying: Now you are free to go where you want, and do as you desire. . . . You do not take a person, who, for years, has been hobbled by chains and liberate him, bring him to the starting line of a race and then say, you are free to compete with all the others, and still justly believe that you have been completely fair. (Quoted from Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights 1984, 27)

Given that egregious race-conscious practices originally created disparities in access and opportunities for racial minorities in this country, alternative policies that only use proxies—such as class—for race will not be nearly as effective in remedying these disparities. The research presented in the following chapters shows that different racial groups experience race with varying

degrees of immediacy, meaning, and importance and that to disregard race and pursue a color-blind approach is to ignore contemporary realities. The disparity in access and opportunity between whites and blacks exists across all class levels. There is a substantial body of evidence, particularly in the desegregation literature, showing that disadvantages suffered by the poor are tremendously exacerbated by race. Although it is true that many white people are poor, it is almost exclusively Hispanics and African Americans who live in *concentrated* poverty (Massey and Denton 1993). The urban ghettos into which most low-income Hispanics and blacks are isolated present fewer opportunities for educational and economic opportunity than the more economically integrated neighborhoods in which low-income whites tend to live (Wilson 1987). This type of evidence refutes the assumption that all low-income children, regardless of race, are equally disadvantaged—one of the major premises underlying arguments for replacing the use of race with class as a plus factor in admissions decisions. Instead, the evidence supports the contention that race cuts across class barriers and that discrimination is a powerful force that money does not easily overcome.

The centuries of racism in this country have left a powerful legacy that permeates all levels of American life and that cannot, and should not, be ignored. Social science evidence belies the idealistic perception of the post–Civil Rights era that Americans are able to judge people solely on the basis of character. More likely, we live our whole lives operating within the societal constraints of our gender, class, and race (Jones 1997). To accurately assess the efficacy of affirmative action, we must understand the true effects of racism on all sectors of society. This legacy cannot be clarified or dismantled by superficial discussions and media sound bites. Thus, this book documents how group membership characteristics play a defining role in determining the experiences and access to opportunities for an individual. Although we uncovered a great deal of relevant research, it became clear to us that there is still an urgent need for more focused study of what policies and efforts are necessary to eradicate the effects of discrimination and to create truly equal opportunity. There must be broader commitment to this sort of study in order both to understand better the significance of racism's legacy and to establish effective and sustainable remedies. We believe that higher education, in which there is a tradition of focused dialogue, debate, and research, is the ideal setting for initiating and sustaining work in this area.

Although affirmative action litigation centers on admissions policies at se-lective schools, the impact of the litigation and the ensuing public debate are more far-reaching, as are the effects of the tendency to ignore the connection between race and opportunity and to downplay arguments of justice for past and present discrimination. The current sound bites that surface from the de-bates, for example, seem to have effectively persuaded the public that race and group membership are irrelevant, that racism has ended, and that indi-vidual rights should prevail over group rights. These contentions, which drive much of the public discourse on this topic, jeopardize much more than the admission of individual minority students to selective institutions. Conse-quently, we address in this book specific attacks on affirmative action and also the broad meaning of the absence of diversity in higher education for the public consciousness, for notions of equity, and for the meaningful education of people of all races and ages.

Synopsis

This book addresses the three major parts of the diversity debate: fairness, merit, and the benefits of diversity.

1. *Fairness*. Affirmative action policies are often criticized as being unfair because they give advantages to *individuals* on the basis of *group* member-ship. Fairness arguments are examined in this book through both empir-ical and theoretical evidence of persisting inequalities in opportunity and access for different racial groups. In an effort to dispel the common notion that only color blindness will achieve true equality, chapters also look at the extent to which racism in various forms is still prevalent among individuals and institutions in the United States, and at how race-conscious policies address racial disparities more effectively than do race-neutral ones.

2. *Merit*. To enhance our discussion of fairness, we explore the need for a broader definition of merit that moves beyond using only test scores and grades as indicators of a student's capacity for academic success.

3. *Benefits*. This book pulls together tangible, empirical evidence on the benefits that diversity (in all its multiple forms and dimensions) brings to the individual, the institution, and the broader society.

Common Misconceptions Addressed

There are four commonly accepted misconceptions about the dynamics of race in higher education and in the broader society that create powerful atti-tudinal barriers to embracing the benefits and fairness arguments of the di-versity debate, and that prevent acceptance of a more inclusive and accurate definition of merit. Despite their lack of substantiation, these popular mis-conceptions have formed the basis for policies that address racial dynamics in the universities and in the broader society. The topics for each of the chap-ters were chosen and developed with these misconceptions in mind.

Misconception 1: Past inequalities in access and opportunity that racial and ethnic minority groups have suffered have been sufficiently addressed and no longer require attention. William Trent and his associates, in their chapter ti-tled "Justice, Equality of Educational Opportunity, and Affirmative Action in Higher Education," examine the trends in participation in higher education by race and sector in enrollment, segregation, and earned degree patterns for 1980–96. To place these participation trends into context, Trent also examines particular features of the early stages of the educational pipeline from K-12 that have been shown to influence educational attainment. Trent reveals the tremendous disparity in the quality of the early pipeline experiences provided to students of different races, ethnicities, and socioeconomic status. These data point to the fact that until the educational playing field has been leveled, ig-noring race—or developing a "color-blind" approach—disregards reality.

Misconception 2: Merit can be defined by test scores. Linda F. Wightman, in her chapter titled "Standardized Testing and Equal Access: A Tutorial," looks at the history of standardized test use and the evolution of tests as the principal screening device in determining admission to higher education. Arguments against affirmative action and other race-conscious policies that are intended to diversify university campuses are predicated on the common public notion that there are ways of measuring merit that are fairly precise and scientific, and that departure from using these tests inevitably results in unfair discrimination against someone who is more deserving. Evidence presented in this book shows that although useful, tests are far from infallible and comprehensive measures of merit, yet test scores are regularly used for measurement purposes beyond those for which they have been designed. Although these tests are sta-tistically sound to perform a specific function, policies based on such a narrow

definition of merit inevitably exclude meritorious students whose qualifications are not consonant with this definition. Wightman concludes that universities should look beyond students' test scores and grades as indicators of their capacity for academic success and include in their definitions of merit the broader qualities of leadership, perseverance, and citizenship.

Misconception 3: Fairness is best achieved through race-neutral policy. The chapter by Shana Levin, "Social Psychological Evidence on Race and Racism," reviews the theoretical and empirical evidence from the field of social psychology to examine two central questions: (1) Does race matter in everyday life? and (2) Should race matter in institutional policies? Levin presents evidence showing that although blatant forms of racism are comparatively rare, many persons still demonstrate unconscious biases toward members of minority groups, and that these biases influence social perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors with deleterious effects on the opportunities afforded many students of color. Because unintentional racial biases persist, policies of "color blindness" perpetuate the status quo. Examining various theories of fairness, Levin concludes that using the same standards to judge individuals from majority and minority groups is unfair because differences in power in society prevent the different groups from having equal opportunity. Therefore, both individual and group characteristics need to be considered in selection and evaluation procedures.

Misconception 4: Diversity programs benefit only students of color. The chapter by Jeffrey F. Milem, "The Educational Benefits of Diversity: Evidence from Multiple Sectors," addresses the question put forth by Justice Powell in the *Bakke* decision—whether a race-conscious policy serves a "compelling interest." Using a multidisciplinary analysis, Milem synthesizes evidence on how diversity benefits the individual, the institution, and society. Contrary to the popular perception that diversity programs benefit only students of color, social science evidence consistently points to the tremendous benefits that diversity in higher education brings to all students, to the institutions, and to society. Among the many benefits that diverse campuses bring are growth in higher-order thinking skills, increased motivation, improved retention, less racial stereotyping, higher earning potential, and greater likelihood of living, working, and socializing comfortably in integrated settings throughout a student's adult life. On the basis of available evidence, Milem concludes that diversity does not lower standards (as opponents of affirmative action often contend); indeed, it raises them by helping to create an environment that is more

intellectually engaging because it includes a broader range of perspectives, experiences, and backgrounds.

Conclusion

After examining the knowledge base on racial dynamics in higher education, we realized that the research evidence has substantive policy implications and widespread educational usefulness, yet such linkages have not yet reached a broader audience. Part of our purpose in offering this book is to make these linkages explicit. However, we are not just documenting the state of current research in this area. We also seek to make a compelling argument for why institutions of higher learning need to focus on issues of racial dynamics, to establish a blueprint for research on what we still need to know, and to suggest strategies and practices for institutions to realize the educational benefits that diversity presents.

Our conclusions in support of affirmative action were arrived at from a rigorous systematic examination of the research as well as from our experience as educators. As we analyzed and assembled the broad spectrum of research presented in this book, we were particularly troubled by public discourse about diversity and racial dynamics, which for the most part has been based on views unsubstantiated by empirical evidence. The chapters that follow demonstrate how empirical evidence creates a very different view of racial dynamics in this country than that shaped by popular misconceptions. Although the evidence in this area is still emerging, there are many lessons to be learned from social science research that have powerful, immediate implications for diversity-related policies in higher education. The research shows, for example, that to bring about the benefits that a diverse student body potentially offers, institutional efforts must extend beyond admissions policies. Diversity must be conceptualized broadly to encompass any aspect of the institution that affects education or campus life. In short, all levels of the university must undergo a meaningful and substantive transformation (Chang 2000; Hurtado et al. 1998). When this happens, the evidence reviewed in this book indicates that the benefits associated with diversity do not only have a high rate of return, but are necessary for creating truly equal opportunity and for effectively educating students to live in the twenty-first century.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PRACTICES
IN A BROADER CONTEXT

Mitchell J. Chang, Daria Witt, and Kenji Hakuta

Although our nation has made significant strides in closing the racial gap in access to opportunity, we have not yet resolved what W. E. B. Du Bois in 1899 called the problem of the color line. It is becoming increasingly clear that there is no one solution. The issue of race and the struggle over equality invariably change over time. The changes coincide with our nation's economic, social, demographic, and political shifts. In the 1960s, for example, racism and inequality existed in blatant forms, and steps that could be taken to abolish them were clear. Although there was great disagreement over the pace at which reforms should take place and some disagreement over whether reforms should even take place, the goals of the civil rights activists were generally viewed as moral, justifiable, and unambiguous. Now that the most blatant forms of racism have been eradicated, civil rights activists target such issues as "aversive racism" and other forms of discrimination that are less tangible than legally enforced separate schools and separate bus seats. Perhaps because the more recent targets are less clear-cut, Americans have not been nearly as supportive of the civil rights agenda as they were in the sixties. Likewise, the education community has not been as successful in recent years in making the case for race-sensitive remedies, particularly the case for why such policies are good for white students. Accordingly, many have concluded that because the laws have been changed to be fair and to root out blatant forms of discrimination, equal access and equal participation are now com-

monplace. The evidence presented in this book, however, leads to a very different conclusion.

By addressing the many facets of racial dynamics in higher education, we have tried to reveal the complexity of the issues and their relevance to those court cases that challenge race-conscious college admissions policies. We want to expand the diversity debate beyond the benefits underrepresented students bring to a college campus or to the education of all students on that campus—a concern receiving much legal interest. We want to include in the debate, but not restrict it to, establishing distributive justice and compensating groups that have suffered discrimination in the past. Those issues are certainly very important and must be addressed adequately with or without affirmative action. We believe that the debate about diversity in higher education should also include a rich discussion about expanding the mission of higher education and transforming universities not only to provide the best education possible to *all* students but also to actively engage in fulfilling the broader democratic goals of our nation. These goals include, but are not limited to, expanding democratic participation in a way that truly embraces the spirit of *E Pluribus Unum*—out of many, one.

Failure to frame current higher education affirmative action practices in a broader context may well perpetuate and reinforce certain pernicious myths about the reality of racism in this country (that it has ended), about the campus climate (that universities are now inclusive), about the potential for underrepresented minorities to succeed (that they are inherently inferior), and about what constitutes merit (that it is best measured by test scores). The evidence presented in this book addresses these myths.

In Chapter 2, William Trent and associates show that a number of factors conspire to place African American and Latino/a students at risk of academic failure in the early stages of their educational experience. Thus Trent et al. stress the need to "level the playing field" by paying greater attention to schools that serve underprivileged students. In evaluating the "merit" of prospective applicants, they suggest that admissions committees look closely at the circumstances under which each student has been educated and the extent to which adequate opportunities have been provided. Moreover, admissions committees need to understand that race cuts across class and that a middle-class black student usually has not had the same opportunities as a middle-class white student, and a poor black student usually has not had the same opportunities as a

poor white student. Trent et al. show that the likelihood of experiencing poverty, living in a single-female-headed household, residing in an urban area, and attending an urban school, for example, differs significantly by race. In addition, many minority parents with college degrees attended segregated, inferior schools, whereas most white parents with college degrees attended more challenging, academically superior schools (Miller 1999) that enhanced the cultural capital these parents can pass along to their children to assist in the children's academic success. Because tracking was even more common two decades ago than it is now, few minority parents have had the benefit of college preparatory programs, and few have attended selective colleges (Miller 1999). Indeed, the majority of African Americans enrolled in higher education are typically first-generation college students (Mickelson and Oliver 1991; Allen 1992). Because the playing field is not level, admissions committees ought to have the flexibility to broaden their definition of merit, enabling them to evaluate applicants on the basis of a sense of history and to consider the cumulative disadvantages that so many minority students have had to overcome.

Chapter 3 by Linda F. Wightman points to the need for a more precise but simultaneously broader definition of merit. When universities judge applicants solely on the basis of test scores and grade point average (GPA), they not only overlook many applicants (of all races and ethnicities) who would contribute greatly to the academic, intellectual, and social life of the university, but they also set themselves up for much greater scrutiny of their affirmative action policies. If admission were based exclusively on GPA and test scores (as it was at the University of Texas before the *Hopwood* decision), the only way a university could admit a substantial number of non-Asian students of color would be to have a two-tiered standard of admission, which heightens scrutiny over "merit." For Wightman, the larger issue is not whether institutions should abandon traditional indicators of merit; rather, for her the issue is that if admission practices are limited to considering only high school GPAs and test scores, then universities seemingly ignore the multifaceted nature of academic success. That earning a college degree requires more than just good test scores and previous academic achievement is well substantiated and well known to educators and admissions officers (Olivas 1992). Given current technological sophistication and the many widely recognized alternate measures of merit, colleges and universities should be able to establish a more comprehensive

rubric that allows for greater precision of both objective and subjective indicators of merit for admissions purposes. Such a rubric that moves beyond the overemphasis on GPA and test scores would help to establish a more just admissions process and also facilitate public explanations of how admissions decisions are made.

Chapter 4 by Shana Levin documents the ways in which race is a major social psychological factor that structures American consciousness and social behaviors, often to the detriment of minority groups. Levin shows that the persistence of racism and discrimination in this country points to the need for universities to take race into account in their admissions decisions, not only because applicants of color have suffered racial injustices throughout their lives, but also because race pervades judgments of merit in subtle yet consistent ways that might work against minority students. Thus, she concludes, individual merit and group membership must both be considered when making admissions decisions. Chapter 4 also has implications for how best to embrace and foster diversity in institutions of higher education. One such implication is that ethnic identities need to be acknowledged and allowed to flourish, which, contrary to popular belief, enables underrepresented students to engage with, rather than disengage from, the broader campus community. Universities also need to work on establishing superordinate identities for students (e.g., sports teams, a feeling of membership in the university community) to facilitate interaction outside of racial and ethnic groups and to develop a greater sense of belonging for all students.

In Chapter 5, Jeffrey F. Milem's documentation of the rich variety of benefits that diversity brings to the individual, the institution, and society highlights the importance of maximizing the full spectrum of diversity on college campuses. Milem shows that the effective institutional strategies extend far beyond admitting a diverse student population. Indeed, the evidence Milem presents shows that structural diversity is not enough to bring about the many benefits of diversity. Universities must also foster environments in which students and faculty feel comfortable exploring and sharing different viewpoints and learning from one another. Ultimately, institutions should undergo a more fundamental transformation to reflect the changing population of their students and faculty, integrating all dimensions of diversity, including but not limited to student, faculty, and administrative composition, a more inclusive curriculum, and structured and continuing dialogue across racial and ethnic lines.

In addition to improving the intellectual life for all students and faculty, integrating the multiple dimensions of diversity, according to Milem, will help break down stereotypes, prevent the phenomenon of self-segregation or balkanization among different racial and ethnic groups, and produce a society beyond the university walls that is more integrated, understanding, and engaged in civic life.

Taken together, the chapters in this book make a concerted argument based on social science evidence that (1) racism in this country has yet to be eradicated; (2) campuses can still do much more to include underrepresented students and to maximize the educational benefits associated with having a diverse student body; (3) students' ability to compete academically for college admissions is highly influenced by multiple social forces that generally affect racial groups differently; and (4) merit cannot be measured by test scores alone. Given these conclusions, we believe that race-sensitive admissions practices still serve compelling interests for individual states and the nation as a whole. Regardless of what the future of such practices might be, which invariably will be decided by either the courts or the public, the issues identified here will not likely disappear even after hard decisions have been made.

At the level of college admissions, debates about merit and how best to measure who is meritorious, for example, will likely persist independent of affirmative action decisions. As we have emphasized throughout this book, diversifying our college and university campuses requires expanding current notions of merit. The issue is not whether the concept of merit and belief in meritocracy should or should not be commonly valued principles. After all, these concepts are an important part of American identity and culture. Rather, as civil rights lawyers Charles Lawrence and Mari Matsuda (1997) contend, the issue is that when merit is idealized and portrayed to operate in a system in which individuals are judged and rewarded only by their own talents and efforts, factors such as prejudice, privilege, inheritance, and accident of birth are not acknowledged as playing a part. Lawrence and Matsuda argue that although everyone knows that money and social networks lead to promising jobs, the belief that people can always pull themselves up by their bootstraps persists; as a consequence, the notion of privilege is obscured. Because of the prevalence of these beliefs, Lawrence and Matsuda contend that affirmative action policies, as well as other means of opening the doors to persons whose qualifications are different from those prescribed by traditional

notions of merit, are easily framed in opposition to quality and worthiness. Framing merit in this way, however, is often at odds with reality.

According to Lawrence and Matsuda, common beliefs about meritocracy typically center on the notion that there is a "best" that is clearly definable and unambiguous, but real life actually requires a "world of multiple bests." For example, they point out that there is no "best" person to accompany a wilderness crew because a good crew requires diverse talents such as those of a naturalist, a paramedic, an experienced guide, and a good cook, all of whom work together to create a strong team of multiple valuable abilities. Yet because the "best" is widely believed to be quantifiable, many diverse, valuable talents are overlooked because they do not fit traditional notions of what the "best" is. Before affirmative action, women and racial and ethnic minorities were prohibited from even applying for jobs in fire departments, police departments, and other industries (including higher education) because they were judged categorically to be inferior to white males. Therefore, in most industries and in education, Lawrence and Matsuda conclude, privilege inevitably trumped merit. Conversely, affirmative action enables the consideration of the talents of those without privilege and helps to expand the notion of merit to include those who have been systematically excluded. Thus, Lawrence and Matsuda argue, affirmative action does not displace merit but actually reinforces it. Refuting allegations that affirmative action was in fact "reverse discrimination," the New York City Commission on Human Rights issued the following statement: "What is lost, therefore, to the majority is not a right, but an expectation of benefits flowing from illegal practices and systems, to which the majority class was never entitled in the first place" (quoted from Weiss 1997, 153).

In addition to logical flaws, other more insidious and deeply rooted obstacles for reconsidering and expanding the notion of merit stem from enduring assumptions about racial inferiority. Sociologist Jerome Karabel (1999) has analyzed the unique status of race in discussions of "preferences" granted to college and university applicants. As Karabel describes, no universities make admissions decisions on the basis of academic merit alone. Instead, universities give preferences to many characteristics in deciding whom to accept. Such characteristics might include where an applicant's parents went to school, whether an applicant's parents are donors or have political influence, where the applicant lives, how old the applicant is (older students are given preference), and whether the applicant has a disability; all are both commonly used and "in-

stitutionally sanctified" characteristics. Despite this, Karabel notes that of the many non-achievement-related characteristics (many of which are also immutable) that are awarded preferences by university admissions officers, race alone is considered "impermissible." Curiously, most people do not doubt that the child of an alumnus "deserves" the coveted admissions spot he/she is awarded, despite the fact that everyone acknowledges the preferences awarded to legacies. Moreover, concerns about the academic qualifications or inferiority of legacies are not regularly raised to challenge this common admissions practice. In contrast, the assumption that underlies arguments against affirmative action is that the racial minorities admitted through affirmative action are inherently unqualified and inferior to their fellow students.

Because of the "rumors of inferiority" and the narrow definitions of merit, affirmative action is often mistakenly viewed as compensating for deficiencies in people rather than deficiencies in the system, thus generating intense opposition against the policy (Crosby 1994). There is little recognition on the part of most white Americans of the current inequalities and racism within the system. The "rumors of inferiority" pervade much more than opposition to affirmative action. They translate into lower expectations by teachers for their students of color, often resulting in students receiving an inferior and "dumbed-down" curriculum. They translate into employers not hiring people of color or not promoting them because the employers assume these minorities do not have the capacity to perform at a high standard. They result in admissions officers evaluating black applicants as inferior to white applicants who have the same credentials. They result in the unequal treatment of people of color by police officers, bankers, shopkeepers, lawyers, and realtors.

Most white Americans want so much to believe that the end of legal discrimination and segregation has brought about universal equality for all racial groups. Despite this goodwill, there is a general lack of awareness on their part about the very separate lives lived by most blacks and Latinos. Few white Americans set foot in inner city neighborhoods and inner city schools that are predominantly black or Latino. Neighborhoods across America are almost as segregated as they were in the days before the civil rights movement. Sugrue (1999) charges that most children attend schools in which their classmates are of their own race and class. The societal and personal costs of this segregation are severe for people of all races. According to Sugrue, the stark separation that exists among people of different races in residential patterns, education, social

functions, and everyday life affords little opportunity to combat the misconceptions, stereotypes, and hostility that lie at the root of the separation. Schoolchildren, he maintains, do not have the benefit of learning from people of different backgrounds who might have perspectives, experiences, customs, and ideas that are different from their own. Furthermore, persistent residential segregation, he adds, results in a great disparity in the quality of job opportunities and networks, education, social services, and wealth for members of different racial groups. Sugrue notes that such separation is reflected in the results of numerous public opinion surveys that reveal the large divide between blacks and whites on many social and political issues. For example, although whites generally believe that discrimination is rapidly disappearing and equal opportunity exists, blacks tend to believe that discrimination is intensifying and that they personally have been denied job opportunities because of their race (quoted in Sugrue 1999). It is obviously difficult for different racial groups to develop a strong sense of compassion and understanding if they exist, essentially, in parallel worlds.

Affirmative action has always been a complicated issue because in many ways it is a policy that serves as a surrogate for the larger responsibilities of the government to rectify the wrongs it has abetted for so many years (Taylor 1999). Affirmative action policies acknowledge the nonexistence of equal opportunity by revealing that a subtle but very real privilege has contributed to the success of those who have "made it" in the system (Crosby 1994). As Crosby and Clayton (1990) point out, affirmative action is threatening to those with power because it exposes the so-called meritocracy for what it is and belies the claims of those who present their own achievements as "determined by merit alone" (Crosby 1994). In the following statement, the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights (1984, 116) captures the perception of affirmative action as part of the moral obligation of American society to compensate those who have suffered from white privilege: "A society that, in the name of the [color-blind] ideal, foreclosed racially-conscious remedies would not be truly color-blind but morally blind. The concept of affirmative action has arisen from this inescapable conclusion." Although the spirit driving affirmative action may prove to be timeless, the actual policies are designed to be a temporary means of ensuring equal opportunity by remedying the significant underrepresentation of members of certain minority groups (Brest and Oshige 1995).

The question "How much diversity is enough?" is commonly posed by both proponents and opponents of affirmative action. The subtext of this question is, of course, "When will affirmative action no longer be necessary?" The answer, albeit unsatisfying, is that we do not know. The reason we do not know is that there are so many factors and processes that still require existing policies. As suggested earlier, issues about race and racism change over time, coinciding with economic, social, demographic, and political shifts. Until discrimination or at least its effects have been eradicated; until the educational playing field is leveled; until all students, regardless of race, class, and gender, have an equal opportunity to succeed in education; until society operates under a definition of merit in which a broad range of applicable talents can be considered and qualified applicants are not overlooked because they do not fit into traditional notions of merit—until all these issues are explored and remedied, we will need affirmative action. William Trent responded to the question of how much diversity is enough by saying that there is enough diversity when the "specter of exceptionality" has been lifted (personal communication, July 24, 1998). In other words, when minority students (e.g., black students at selective schools, women in engineering, Latino/as in law school) are no longer given the additional burden of having to represent their race and their gender, their numbers are adequate. When minority students no longer feel isolated and are represented in universities, in office buildings, in leadership positions in numbers that are commensurate with their numbers in the general population, there will be enough diversity. At such a time, existing affirmative action policies might be rendered obsolete.

We believe, however, that levels of diversity cannot and should not be legislated. Institutions of higher education have always operated under a high degree of academic freedom that has enabled them to define their own mission, their own admissions process, hiring process, and curricula. Universities need to be able to decide and clearly articulate how diversity serves the mission of their institution. This should be defined in terms of the type of education the university wishes to provide its students and the university's perception of its role in the broader society.

Universities are by no means the only party responsible for improving racial circumstances in this country and realizing our nation's democratic ideals. Elementary and secondary schools arguably may play an even more critical role in those endeavors. Without receiving a quality education in the early grades,

for example, many students find it difficult to go on to college and succeed. Given this, we are deeply concerned that all too often, public schools that serve low-income minority students are poorly funded, that practices such as tracking continue to have a disproportionately negative impact on students of color, and that attempts at educating all students to thrive in a multiracial society are overly politicized. In addition, there is much misinformation passed along to students about how to apply to college, the existence of financial aid, and the need to take gatekeeping courses. The lack of quality information or outright misinformation prevents students whose parents are not knowledgeable about college admission requirements (who are disproportionately poor and minority) from ever applying to college and joining the ranks of future leaders. Attention to these and other K-12 educational issues, however, is often artificially juxtaposed with affirmative action efforts in higher education. In practice, the two go hand in hand; more often than not, however, educational policies treat each as independent of the other. Often we fail to consider broader solutions to educational issues, which may account in part for why affirmative action policies are typically judged in very narrow terms.

When we look beyond higher education, for example, the evidence suggests that affirmative action has been tremendously successful in its three decades of existence. Its success is amply demonstrated in a 1996 Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights report, which shows that the employment sector has undergone tremendous changes as a result of affirmative action. For example, the number of blacks employed as firefighters and police officers tripled or quadrupled between 1970 and 1990. Industries such as manufacturing, construction, trucking, and service have also diversified and added many more people of color to their managerial ranks. The report also notes the tremendous advances women have made in traditionally male-dominated fields such as architecture, economics, and law—advances that can be largely attributed to affirmative action. There has also been a tremendous increase in the number of racial and ethnic minority students attending college. According to the Commission on Civil Rights report, in 1970 only 4.5 percent of blacks over the age of twenty-five had completed four years of college; by 1980, the figure had risen to 7 percent, and by 1990, to 11.9 percent.

Perhaps of more relevance to this book is that greater diversity in college and university campus demographics has brought about a number of changes outside the realm of higher education. For example, Grissmer et al. (1994)

explored possible explanations for the tremendous increase in the verbal and math proficiency scores of black thirteen- and seventeen-year-olds between 1970 and 1990 on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The researchers found that although the scores of white teenagers increased by only approximately 0.1 standard deviation units in the twenty-year time period, the scores of black students increased by more than 0.6 standard deviation units, reducing the gap between the two racial groups' scores by one-half. Latino/a students also made significant gains between 1975 and 1990.[1] The scores of Latino/a seventeen-year-olds increased 0.2 standard deviations in math and more than 0.5 standard deviation units in verbal. According to Grissmer et al., the single most important factor that has contributed to black students' tremendous gains in test scores over the past twenty years is the increase in the educational level attained by black parents during the same period. In fact, almost half of the points black students gained on the NAEP test during these two decades can be attributed to rising parental education levels. Indeed Grissmer et al. note that the percentage of black teenagers whose mothers had completed college rose 52 percent between 1970 and 1990; the percentage of fathers who were college graduates increased 268-fold in the same twenty-year period.

Of course affirmative action is not the only cause of the improvement in the socioeconomic status of many minorities. Certainly many political, social, economic, and demographic changes have played a major part in the dramatic increase in the number of black college graduates (e.g., the desegregation of K-12 schooling and the consequent improved education for many minority students, the gradual demise of *legal* discrimination, and global competitiveness). Nevertheless, affirmative action can be credited for rapidly expanding the number of minorities admitted to previously all-white selective institutions and to jobs that permitted them to enter the ranks of the middle class, providing a better education and greater social and economic stability (Bowen and Bok 1998). In turn, these changes improved the chances that the children of these graduates would succeed academically. As William Taylor (1998, 13) remarks in reference to the increase in NAEP scores: "Many took full advantage of the opportunity, worked hard, got their degrees, found better and more remunerative jobs than their predecessors, married and formed stable families. All of this created an environment in which their children could achieve, as reflected on the NAEP assessment."

The effectiveness of affirmative action policies to date does not contradict our conclusion that they are needed as much today as ever. Judging from the accumulated body of evidence that points to the benefits of diversity for everyone, the continuing disparities in access and opportunities available to students of different races, the fallibility of test scores and grades as indicators of merit, and the persistence of racism and discrimination in American society, affirmative action has much left to accomplish. For these and other reasons noted throughout this book, sensible policies that seek to overcome the negative effects associated with race cannot avoid taking race into account. As such, class-based affirmative action, for example, will not adequately address the disparities that were originally created by practices designed to systematically exclude individuals of certain racial groups. It appears that substituting class for race in making college admissions decisions will do little to increase the numbers of underrepresented students of color, mainly because in absolute numbers, most poor people in the country are white. Such a substitution would also fail to account for racial disparities in academic performance, which are independent of class, as discussed by Trent et al. in Chapter 2.

Even more significant are the tremendous disparities that continue to exist across racial and ethnic groups in the employment sector. For example, the Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights (1996) report on the state of affirmative action showed that almost 97 percent of managers in Fortune 1000 and Fortune 500 service companies are white males. Less than 2.5 percent of senior-level management jobs in the private sector are held by black men and women. According to the commission, the wages of black men with professional degrees are only 79 percent of those of their white counterparts; the wages of black women with professional degrees are only 60 percent of those of white men. As Trent et al. point out in Chapter 2, despite the tremendous increases in the numbers of minorities attending college, there has been little progress toward parity because the eligibility pool of minority high school graduates has increased at a rate greater than their college attendance rates. In the realm of faculty employment, the American Council on Education (1995) reports the "gross underrepresentation" of people of color on university faculties and the fact that the faculty of color who are present tend to be "clustered on the lower rungs of the professoriate" in non-tenure-track positions (quoted in Citizens' Commission on Civil Rights 1996, 31). As the report concludes: "The sad truth is that despite thirty years of civil rights laws, some people

grow up untouched by them—cut off from access to services and opportunities which would make them full participants in society. While neither a panacea nor a substitute for economic growth, education and job training, affirmative action will continue to be needed as long as discrimination persists."

The multidisciplinary evidence presented in this book underscores the need for continued support of diversity through policies such as affirmative action. Although a *legal* rationale for affirmative action in higher education is somewhat limited to discussions about how diversity might serve a "compelling interest," we should not lose sight of the fact that the political, philosophical, and moral justifications of the policy stem from concerns about achieving justice, fairness, and a reckoning with the consequences of past actions that persist into the present. Despite the solid, cumulative body of scholarship that provides clear support for affirmative action policies, public sentiment has been moving, in our view, in the wrong direction. Such detachment from the evidence is not difficult to explain. Many laws and policies that have come into existence during the past few years have reinforced ideas of "personal responsibility" and a "blaming" of the victim, relieving the onus on the government to address and fix deeply rooted social ills. Such policies are flawed because they assume a fair system in which persons of all racial, ethnic, class, and gender backgrounds are competing on a level playing field. The evidence in this book amply demonstrates the unevenness that exists on many parts of the playing field—an unevenness that those in power seem reluctant to acknowledge.

The pressing issues of diversity and affirmative action are more immediate and personal to the academy than almost any other social issue that we as researchers are called on to address. These issues affect the very composition of the classes we teach, the constitution of the faculties we are part of, and the atmosphere in which we work. These issues are also central to the very mission of higher education and the purpose that the academy serves in the broader society. According to Tierney (1997, 192), "public higher education is a public good" and has traditionally been defined as a vehicle for upward mobility for all people. As such, those institutions have a responsibility that extends beyond admitting only those applicants who score highest on a standardized test. They have, Tierney contends, an obligation to serve the public good by developing policies that "seek to advance, affirm, and expand participation in the democratic public sphere" (193). We also believe that the academy, with its ability to foster dialogues that engage different viewpoints and to bring together people

from all walks of life for a common purpose, should play a greater leadership role in dismantling the segregation that has persisted during the forty-five years since the *Brown* decision. Our position is not only based on educational and moral grounds; it is supported by the cumulative research record.

The extent to which colleges and universities can play a more proactive role in dismantling segregation and in better serving the public good may well be decided in the nation's highest court. The widely divergent rulings in circuit-level courts regarding the constitutionality of race-conscious college admissions practices in recent years have led legal analysts to predict that the Supreme Court may soon weigh in on the issue. It appears that at least one of the two cases filed against the University of Michigan will likely go before the Supreme Court. At the time this book went to press, both sides in these two cases seemed determined to petition the Supreme Court for review if a favorable judgment was not received from the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit. Similar cases that previously received widespread national attention had only recently been abandoned before reaching the highest court. Officials from both the University of Texas and the University of Georgia announced in November and August 2001, respectively, that they would not ask the Supreme Court to overturn separate lower court rulings that had struck down each university's race-conscious admissions policies. Unlike the cases involving those institutions, the University of Michigan has relied much more heavily on the social science evidence to defend its race-conscious admissions policies.

Although many questions still need to be addressed by future research, as indicated throughout this book (researchers, of course, always want to conclude that more research is needed), the data supporting diversity and affirmative action are well and growing.[2] It is becoming increasingly clear that affirmative action policies work and that they are still very much needed in higher education, especially when framed in the broader organizing context we have presented in this book. We hope that our framework for examining the evidence around the themes of fairness, merit, and the benefits of diversity mirrors the way in which the public and the courts organize their beliefs around race and opportunity. The evidence to date offers not just a strong set of conclusions but also a way of building a coherent research agenda that tests these hypotheses in ever stronger form, and in ways that are demanded by the users of research.